

Pest Alert

Plant Protection and Quarantine

March 2006

Stop the Spread of the Cuban Slug!



A Cuban slug in the contracted state.



Brown and albino Cuban slugs in the extended state.

In the last several years, a newly introduced species of slug, *Veronicella cubensis*, has multiplied on the island of Rota and is now a serious pest of local crops and threatens other areas. The effect on the island's natural environment and on ecotourism is potentially very serious. Residents should take precautions not to move slugs to new areas of the United States' Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, where they may cause further damage. The slugs hitchhike on unwashed plants and produce that are carried to other islands.

Description

The Cuban slug varies in appearance and can sometimes be confused with another introduced, but less serious, slug species—the bean slug (*Sarasinula plebeia*). The coloration of the Cuban or bean slug may show varying shades

of brown, sometimes with two black or dark-brown bands on the back, which may appear as spots. A thin, lighter-colored stripe may appear on the midline running lengthwise. Slugs may also be albino, or white in color. They can be smooth or granular in appearance. The only way to positively distinguish the Cuban slug from the bean slug is laboratory dissection performed by an expert.

Agricultural Threat

Both the juvenile and mature forms of the Cuban slug can cause significant feeding damage to plants. This slug feeds on many different native, ornamental, and agricultural plants. These include melon, pumpkin, pepper, eggplant, cabbage, cassava, taro, sweet potato, yam, papaya, banana, star fruit, mango, noni, citrus, and coffee.

Public Health Warning

Like many other species of slugs and snails, the Cuban slug can carry a tiny organism that causes potentially lethal disease in humans. The organism is a parasitic nematode, *Angiostrongylus cantonensis*, also called the rat lungworm. People get sick by eating uncooked or undercooked slugs or snails, or by eating lettuce or other uncooked greens that contain small slugs that may not be noticed during food preparation. Even the slime trail of slugs and snails can contain the nematode that causes disease. For more information about this disease and how to prevent it, contact your local health department or visit the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <<http://www.dpd.cdc.gov/dpdx/HTML/Angiostrongyliasis.htm>>.



Several immature Cuban slugs feed on woody biomass (left) and on fallen star fruit.

Don't Spread the Slug!

Before taking vegetables or plants to other islands, make sure all soil has been removed by washing, and inspect the material carefully to make certain there are no attached slugs. Be especially careful with live plants that have roots or lots of leaves because these can become hiding places for slug eggs or small (immature) slugs.

Control Measures

Planting materials known to be free of the pest is the best protection for areas not yet infested with the Cuban slug. In agricultural areas where slugs are already present, pelletized food bait that contains metaldehyde as the active ingredient is usually the most effective type of chemical control. Initially, it may be necessary to apply bait pellets throughout the growing area. Subsequent applications can be targeted in areas where

slugs hide during the day, such as field edges, rocky areas, or in or under piles of debris. Federal law requires the person applying pesticides to follow the directions and precautions listed on the pesticide label.

Note: Metaldehyde bait, if eaten, is very poisonous to people and domestic animals. In some cases, it may be impossible to place the baits in areas where slugs, but not domestic animals, are likely to find and consume the baits.

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Photo credits: All photos in this Pest Alert were taken by David Robinson, APHIS–Plant Protection and Quarantine's national malacologist.

This publication reports research involving pesticides. All uses of pesticides must be registered by appropriate State and/or Federal agencies before they can be recommended.

CAUTION: Pesticides can be injurious to humans, domestic animals, desirable plants, and fish or other wildlife—if they are not handled or applied properly. Use all pesticides selectively and carefully. Follow recommended practices for the disposal of surplus pesticides and pesticide containers.

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